

the best night of your life by mrstiffanyray

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Summary:

“El.” He says it once he’s sure he can trust his voice again, when his head has (mostly) stopped spinning after he feels what it’s like to kiss her again, the way it feels like the first time every time.

She looks up, her eyes questioning for only a split second. Her lips are parted in an almost smile and Mike hopes he won’t have to wait 353 days to kiss them ever again.

(prompt: "mike and el after the snowball with their friends, trying to find a time alone before she has to go back with Hopper and Owens!")

the best night of your life

Author's Note:

from a prompt @stardustsantiago sent me on tumblr, but i kind of just ran with the snow ball idea and it turned into something else. either way there's lots of fluff so, you know.

this is my first time writing for ST so feedback would def be appreciated!

With all of the people around them, there might as well only be two. The fancy decorations and loud music are only a faint distraction; the chaperons standing on the edge, everyone else surrounding them on the dance floor. It's all background noise for Mike.

"El." He says it once he's sure he can trust his voice again, when his head has (mostly) stopped spinning after he feels what it's like to kiss her again, the way it feels like the first time every time.

She looks up, her eyes questioning for only a split second. Her lips are parted in an almost smile and Mike hopes he won't have to wait 353 days to kiss them ever again.

She doesn't say anything, doesn't ask when he says her name again, quieter this time, like he's just relieved to be able to say it again to her, *really her* and not thin air.

Eventually, the crowd on the dance floor begins to part. He can see El looking around in mild confusion, not sure what to do next.

"Do you want to get some punch?" he asks.

"Punch," El repeats, half a question, half not. It's not one of the many new words she's learned over the last year apparently.

Mike starts to lead her over to the table. "It's this drink they have for every school dance." He can't help the smile that falls back on his face at how nice it feels, the familiarity in explaining something new to her. "They put it in a huge bowl and all the kids drink from it."

El nods, her nose wrinkling a bit at the mention of *everyone* drinking from it.

“In their own cups,” Mike assures her once they reach the table. He takes the ladle and pours them both a cup, handing El hers. “It’s usually good, except for the year Dustin’s mom volunteered to make it. We don’t think she knows how to fix anything unless it’s for cats.”

El’s too busy sipping away at her drink to pay attention to his joke. She downs the whole cup in almost seconds and without question starts pouring herself another cup full.

“It’s really good.” She says it so earnestly Mike’s smile can only grow wider.

“Yeah, see, I told you. I don’t know how to make it but I bet my mom would. Maybe I could ask her to teach me and I could bring some over for you sometimes.”

It’s not so much the thought of punch that makes him suggest it, more so the fact Mike wants to make it clear he plans to keep his visits to the cabin a regular thing. He knows *El* knows that, but sometimes it’s nice to hang the reminder in the air, even if just for his own self.

Hopper hadn’t been all ears for the idea at first, but there just wasn’t and still isn’t any question to Mike seeing her. He’s learned the secret knock, can map out the way towards the cabin with his eyes closed now, and always makes sure to bring Eggos with him as a sort of makeshift flowers in a bouquet gift even though the cabin’s fridge is typically stocked with them.

It sucks, kind of, how they can’t spend time together anywhere but one place. Mike wishes he could hold her hand in public and take her to see movies or even show her how to play arcade games on the weekends.

But anything is better than sitting alone in his room calling out to someone he thinks isn’t there for an entire year. Anything is better than not knowing she’s okay, not knowing if he’ll ever see her again. So he’ll take what he can get.

Which is why he had tried not to be too bummed over the idea of her not showing up to the dance. Hopper warned he couldn't make any promises but would try his best. Mike would have been sad, he would have wished she could have come, but it wouldn't have been anything comparable to those 353 days.

Mike doesn't have to worry about any of that though-not with her standing right in front of him, looking beautiful, making him wonder if things could possibly get more perfect, on her third cup of punch-

At that realization he laughs and reaches out a hand to touch the one her cup is in.

"El, maybe, don't you wanna slow down?"

"No."

Before he can say anything else he can hear Lucas asking, "Are you two just going to make googly eyes at each other all night and hold up the line? Some of us are thirsty too!"

Mike turns and there are Lucas and Max, arm in arm, and for all the picking and teasing he's had to take from Lucas since meeting El he's ready to take advantage of it.

"You're one to talk!"

"At least I don't forget *how* to talk when a certain *somebody* is around."

"Oh yeah right, did you *see* yourself earlier trying to ask her to dance?"

He gets caught up with his and Lucas's playful banter, but he still takes notice of El showing Max to the punch bowl out the corner of his eye. She's been trying to make amends, or trying to "*make friends*" with Max, something El had told him last week.

"Whatever," Lucas is saying. "At least make your girlfriend share some punch with the rest of the school."

"She's not my girlfriend." He says it quick but it's not a defense thing.

Not anymore.

He's just... not entirely sure *what* El is to him. She's definitely not just a friend. But it's not like he's asked her to be his girlfriend and he's not even sure she would *get it* because he hasn't bothered talking to her about it, why should he when everything already feels so natural and great between them and now his head is spinning and he has to set his already forgotten cup of punch down.

Lucas makes a face like he wants to say "*yeah right*" but he just moves to steal Mike's drink instead.

El's stopped talking to Max now and she's looking at Mike like she's almost confused, almost hurt maybe, but he must be imagining that. Suddenly he regrets even saying anything.

Even after several more minutes of idle talking with Lucas and Max, with Dustin eventually joining them and bragging about every girl eyeing him now that he's danced with Mike's pretty older sister (*ugh*), El's still giving him a look.

"Do you want to go outside? In the back?" Mike asks her when he decides he can't take it anymore. "It's more quiet, less people."

El nods. Lucas starts to make kissy noises like he's won some kind of silent battle and Mike makes sure to flip him off before showing El where to go.

"What does that mean?" she asks him when they start walking towards the exit.

"What?"

"The..." El's brows furrow. Then she lifts her middle finger in the air.

Mike tries not to snort and moves her hand back down. "Oh. Um." He opens the back door and shakes his head. "I'll tell you later."

They both sit down on the cold concrete, the music now just faint in Mike's ears. He thinks of Hopper saying it's *too dangerous* to sit around outside alone but they're right in front of the door and he thinks he deserves a little alone time with El after everything.

"I'm not your girlfriend." El says it so out of nowhere it feels like it gives him whiplash, like she's been waiting to question him. "Why not?"

"Oh. It's just..." Mike can feel how warm his cheeks suddenly get. He hopes it's too dark out for her to see. "It's just, I never-I mean, we never-"

"I am a girl, and I am your friend." El's words are firm. "So why am I not your girlfriend?"

Mike opens his mouth but doesn't trust anything except a jumbled mess to come out again. He's not sure she even fully gets what she's asking and it's so *stupid* of him to even be worried over whether or not she would actually want something like that. They've kissed and they've waited an entire year for each other and more and it should be obvious to him whether or not she wants that, but...

"Mike." El reaches out a hand to rest on his arm, saying nothing else.

"Well I mean, I never asked you," he finally manages to say. "About being my girlfriend, I mean. Because it's *different*, like how you wouldn't go to a dance with your sister. You know? A girlfriend isn't just a girl you're friends with. A girlfriend means dating and dating means holding hands and kissing and stuff, whenever you want, those are the rules of it or whatever, and I just didn't know if that's what you want and I don't want to ever make you feel weird or anything and-"

"Mike," she interrupts him. "I know what it means."

"Oh," Mike breathes.

"We already do those things." El moves her hand on his arm to his own hand that had been resting on his bouncing leg, holding it in hers. "Hold hands." She reaches up to lightly touch his bottom lip with her free hand and Mike forgets how to use words again. "Kissing." Then she pulls back and offers a smile his way, repeating her question from before. "So... why am I not your girlfriend?"

"Do you want to be?" Mike asks dumbly.

“Mike.” The third time she says it a laugh follows behind and yeah, he’s just that, *dumb*. But he’s dumb and lucky and soon he’s laughing with her.

Before he can lose his nerve Mike asks, “Can I kiss you again?”

“Those are the rules,” El reminds him.

He leans forward and brushes his lips against hers, careful, not wanting to ruin anything. It’s short and not much but it feels all the more important when it’s the first time he’s kissing her knowing she’s his girlfriend.

Girlfriend, he repeats in his head like a mantra. *Girlfriend, El, girlfriend, El, girlfriend, girlfriend.*

El squeezes his hand, bringing him back into focus. He looks at her and Mike can’t believe it, can’t believe she’s actually real and all of this is happening, even now- his free hand reaches out to touch her arm, then her shoulder, then slides up to cup her cheek and he just holds it there, his sudden amazement throwing off any nerves he might have had before.

“I can’t believe you’re here,” he finally blurts out loud. His thumb runs across her cheek gently and he takes in how warm it feels, how it’s really her and not just him imagining anything.

El only smiles, her gaze bashfully flickering away a few times before finally settling on him.

Mike pulls his hand away but makes sure to keep the other locked with hers. “We should go back inside,” he says reluctantly.

After they both stand and walk back in, Mike looks around and sees how nothing has changed even though it feels like his world has stopped spinning. The people, the music, the decorations- he looks off to see a huge poster on one side of the wall that reads “**IT’S THE BEST NIGHT OF YOUR LIFE!**” in obnoxious letters. “**MAKE THE MOST OF IT!**”

Yeah, Mike thinks, his gaze falling to his and El’s intertwined fingers. *Right. Yeah.*